Savages, Barbarians and Citizen-Subjects

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> "The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room. And only one activity: clearing away. His need for fresh air and open space is stronger than any hatred."
> Walter Benjamin

> "Now what's going to happen to us without barbarians? / Those people were a kind of solution."
> Constantine P. Cavafy

While perhaps not as prevalent and popular as either the pirate or the ninja, the barbarian, unlike those other two, has figured prominently in *both* popular culture *and* political theory.[1] Relative to popular culture, the past two and a half decades have seen two 'Conan the Barbarian' movies (with a third projected for release in 2008), Nobel Prize author J.M. Coetzee (2000[1980]) has written a novella about relations between barbarians and Empire, barbarians play a pivotal role in the second installment of the *Lord of the Rings* franchise, and, finally, the credit card company, Capital One, has run a barbarian themed advertising campaign for a number of years. Additionally, the BBC produced a four-part documentary on the history of the Roman Empire from the perspective of the barbarian tribes called 'Barbarians' and the touring museum exhibition, 'The Mysterious Bog People,' has been quite popular. Barbarians, it seems, are everywhere.

Of greater interest to the political theorist is the legacy of the barbarian within the discourse of political theory, which, while substantial, has rarely been commented upon. Indeed, it isn't much of a stretch to claim that the barbarian has lurked unnoticed behind every great discovery in modern political theory. Consider the following examples. Machiavelli (1995[1513]: 77), the discoverer of the modern concept of the political, commands Italy to "pray

[1] With the exception of Carl Schmitt, who theorized the pirate in his *The Nomos of the Earth* (2003[1974]) and *Land and Sea* (1997[1954]).

to God that he will send her someone who will redeem her from this ill treatment and from the insults of the barbarians."[2] Montesquieu, the discoverer of the modern concept of the social, speaks of "our fathers the Germans" (i.e., the Franks) who were "both warriors and free, considered that their blood should be spilled only when they were armed" (1989[1748]: Book VI, Chapter 18).[3] In the late nineteenth century, Nietzsche (1994a[1887]: First Essay, §11) inversed Machiavelli's exhortation, demanding a return of the barbarian, "At the center of all these noble races we cannot fail to see the blond beast of prey, the magnificent *blond beast* avidly prowling round for spoil and victory; this hidden centre needs release from time to time, the beast must out again, must return to the wild … it was the noble races which left the concept of 'barbarian' in their traces wherever they went."[4] Finally, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri

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[2] The literature on 'Machiavelli and the political' is quite large. While few are in complete agreement with respect to the 'meaning' of Machiavelli, nearly all agree that his thought presents an innovation in the history of political theory. Consider the following: Leo Strauss (1965[1953]: 161-2, 177-80) presents Machiavelli as "that greater Columbus," who inaugurates the transition from 'classical natural right' to 'modern natural right;' Sheldon Wolin (2004[1960]: 198-9) credits Machiavelli with articulating the 'autonomy of political theory' through his "attempt to exclude from political theory whatever did not appear to be strictly political;" and, finally, for Louis Althusser (1999[1995]: 23), Machiavelli presents the invention of a "new" style of "political writing" that brings "political practice" under the purview of "political theory" hence leading to the invention of the "revolutionary *utopian* manifesto." More generally, see Lefort (1972), Pitkin (1984), Pocock (2003[1975]), Skinner (1978) and Strauss (1958). Regardless of differences in interpretations, all commentators are in agreement that Machiavelli's importance is found in bringing the political within the horizon of secular thought – that is, in finding a place for the political between the 'Natural' and the 'Divine.'

[3] I follow Singer (2004, 2006) in arguing that 'the social' as an object of theoretical reflection and political action was 'discovered' in the eighteenth century. Singer provides the examples of Montesquieu and Adam Smith. According to Singer, "what this 'discovery' entailed was the uncovering of a social bond, or social substance, that is not immediately dependent on a political will (even as the 'discovery of the political' in the previous centuries had entailed the separation of the political will from a divine will) […] a specifically social theory developed out of political theory, that the social first arose as a division internal to the political, as the latter's delineation of its own other" (2004: 31). The location of the discovery of the social in the eighteenth century is in conscious opposition to the Foucauldian/History of the Present approach that locates the discovery of the social in the mid- to late nineteenth centuries with the development of social insurance and welfare regimes. See, for instance, Donzelot (1979[1977], 1991[1982]) and Deleuze's postscript to Donzelot's *Political of Families* (1979[1977]). Both understand 'the social' as an adjective – '*social* worker,' '*social* insurance,' '*social* issues,' etc. Rose (1999: 112) follows the general thrust of Donzelot's argument, but goes so far as to locate the "invention of the social" in the twentieth century. While the periodization between Singer and the Foucauldians differs, there is a sense in which, for the Foucauldians, 'the social' acts as a 'suture' attempting to repair the breach in the political identified by Singer.

[4] While Nietzsche – perhaps in response to both Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche and his involvement with the Nazis – has long been taken seriously as a political thinker on the Continent (for instance, Bataille (1992[1942]); Deleuze (1983[1962]); Derrida (1979[1978]); Foucault (1998b[1967], 1998c[1971]); and Klossowski (1997[1969]) have all written important works on Nietzsche), his reputation as a political thinker in Anglo-America is of somewhat recent vintage. Additionally, nearly all political interpretations of Nietzsche within Anglo-America have

(2000: 213) present the eschatological image of “a new nomad horde, a new race of barbarians, [that] will arise to invade or evacuate Empire.”[5] Once again, it seems that barbarians are everywhere.

Why A Dissertation On Barbarians?

While the barbarian has been central to the development of modern political theory, consideration of the figure and use of the barbarian in political theory has been sorely neglected.[6]

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been written within the ‘Continental’ as opposed to the ‘Analytic’ tradition. In order to rehabilitate Nietzsche as a serious philosopher whose work was an anathema to Nazism, Walter Kaufmann (1974[1950]) had to recast Nietzsche as an apolitical or even anti-political thinker. (Such an interpretation certainly has a textual basis in Nietzsche’s own work as he describes himself as “the last *anti-political* German” (1989b[1888]: §3). Kaufmann appears to take this comment at face value without consideration of the deconstructive point that to say ‘anti-political’ is to speak in relation to ‘political’ and, further, the use of the word ‘last’ – especially when combined with the infamous megalomania of *Ecce Homo* – could reasonably be taken to mean that *after* Nietzsche, no German could be *anti*-political; that is, they must be *political*.) It wasn’t until the publication of Tracy B. Strong’s (2000[1975]) *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* that the importance of Nietzsche’s contribution to political theory was recognized in Anglo-American political theory. While Strong’s work has done much to rehabilitate Nietzsche’s reputation as a political thinker, Strong did not discuss the ‘blond beast’ or the figure of the barbarian at any great length. Until recently, Kaufmann’s (1974[1950]: 284-306) discussion was the most comprehensive. More recently, Bruce Detwiler (1990) has approached the question of the ‘blond beast’ in terms of the “politics of aristocratic radicalism.” (It seems noteworthy that both Strong and Detwiler’s books were originally written as dissertations, which suggests that it was graduate students and not established scholars who fueled the renaissance in Anglo-American Nietzsche studies.) Gerd Schank (2004) and Daniel Conway (2004) have returned to a reconsideration of ‘the blond beast.’ As Conway (2004: 157) points out, discussions of ‘the blond beast’ have been overwhelmingly concerned with “the *blondness* of the blond beast” which has resulted in a lack of attention on “the *beastliness* of this exotic creature.” Hence, considerations of the ‘blond beast’ have remained within the horizon of Hitler. The question of whether or not Nietzsche is a political thinker and the exact nature of his politics continues contested as ever; see generally Ansell-Pearson (1991, 1994); Detwiler (1990); Strong (1996, 2000[1975]); and Warren (1985, 1988, 1997, 1998).

[5] To the best of my knowledge, criticism and interpretation of Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* has failed to discuss the role of the barbarian in the destruction of Empire. Perhaps this is not the fault of commentators as the image of the barbarian does not appear in *Multitude* (2004), thus suggesting that they left the image behind. Hardt and Negri construct their image of ‘the new barbarian’ out of Benjamin (1999[1931]) and Deleuze and Guatarri (1987[1980]).

[6] I certainly do not claim that the barbarian is not also present in earlier iterations of political theory. The difference between Greek and *barbaros* is central to ancient Greek political theory. For instance, Aristotle structures his *Politics* around the opposition between Greek and non-Greek [*barbaros*] such that the non-Greek is always ‘the other’ of the Greek; the ‘outside’ that renders the ‘inside’ intelligible. This opposition, between Greek and non-Greek, is, however, hierarchic: “as the poets say ‘It is proper for Greeks to rule non-Greeks,’ on the assumption that non-Greek and slave are by nature identical” (1252b5-9). The opposition between ‘rulers by nature’ and ‘slaves by nature’ structures the subsequent argument. However, it is worth noting that while Aristotle structures his argument around Greek/*barbaros*, the secondary literature has reduced *barbaros* to “slave by nature” of which the *barbaros* is but one example thus largely ignoring the opposition between Greek and *barbaros* as such. Indeed, the distinction is displaced into an extended debate on the meaning of “the political animal,” who is not, by nature, a slave – and, consequently, an attempt to theorize the political without consideration of the non- or apolitical (see Depew (1995); Kullmann (1991[1980]); Lord (1991); Mulgan (1974); and Roberts (1989); the exception is Raaflaub ([1985]2004: especially 174-6)). However, Hall (1989, especially Chapter 3) notes that the barbarian has suffered undue neglect in studies of classical civilization. The barbarian is especially prevalent in drama. The dramatists and the poets were

Given the proliferation of the barbarian in modern political theory, it is surprising that the barbarian has not been the subject of serious scholarly scrutiny. This dissertation seeks to address this gap.

The major claim of the dissertation is that the savage and the barbarian are constitutive poles of modern political theory. While both the barbarian and the savage lead to the same place – the State – their relation to the State and, hence, the State itself is significantly different. In order to emphasize this difference, I have isolated French political theory written the between 1700 and 1760 for analysis.[7] The reason for this selection is two-fold. First, the period sits between the development of the state of nature/social contract argument (i.e., the savage) in the political theory of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke (the former died in 1679 and the latter in 1704) and the renaissance of the state of nature/social contract argument by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*On the Social Contract* was published in 1762). Second, beginning with the Comte de Boulainvilliers' glosses on the Reports of the Intendants, written around 1700 but published posthumously as *l'Etat de France* in 1727, the figure of the barbarian in the form of the 'Frank,' understood as the sire of the French people, entered into political theory.[8] The barbaric Frank continues to appear in French political theory (including, notably, Montesquieu) throughout this

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routinely cited as authorities by the philosophers (the cross-fertilization of each is already indicated in the passage from Aristotle quoted above): "it was the fifth century which invented the notion of the barbarian as the universal anti-Greek against whom Hellenic – especially Athenian – culture was defined, and tragedy's contribution to the theory of the barbarian has been underestimated" (Hall 1989: 5).

[7] One could also approach the question of the constitution of modern political theory *via* the opposition between barbarian and savage through a study of the Scottish Enlightenment, which presented its texts, much like the French discourse, through a consideration of history, theory and politics. It is worth recalling, in this regard, that David Hume originally became famous for his massive six-volume *The History of England* (1754-62) and not for his *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40). The former is rarely read today, while the latter is now widely read – a complete reversal of the fortune of these texts. The other central texts are Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and his *Wealth of Nations* (1776) and Adam Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767). The importance of this branch of the barbarist discourse is recognized, but it is not studied in this particular project.

[8] As noted by Foucault (2003[1997]: 118-22), Boulainvilliers' discourse is a re-activation of an older discourse, the most famous example of which is François Hotman's *Franco-Gallia* (1573) published in the aftermath of the Wars of Religion. Arendt (1966: 162n7), however, disagrees with this interpretation calling it a "mis-conception." See note 15 below for more on Hotman and Boulainvilliers

period until Rousseau's reversal. Indeed, Rousseau's reversal – from barbarian to savage – can only be understood through a consideration of the barbarian in the political theory of his opponents.

This dissertation does not seek to enquire into actual, empirical, real barbarians. Hence, this is neither a history nor an anthropology of barbarian peoples. Rather, this dissertation enquires into the use of the barbarian as a figure, concept and relation in modern political theory. Accordingly, the dissertation involves a way of reading the history of political theory such that the barbarian assumes a central role within it. The approach taken is genealogical and deconstructive: how and why did the barbarian enter into political theory? Who are the enemies of the barbarian? What thoughts and actions does the barbarian make possible – or impossible? Which problem does the barbarian solve? By re-centering the barbarian, I also intend to de-center individual authors and events; hence, the dissertation is not 'about' Montesquieu or 'about' the Old Regime, for instance.

The dissertation presents an excavation and theoretical elaboration of the figure of the barbarian in modern political theory, with a particular emphasis on its appearance in early- to mid-eighteenth century French political theory. Such an excavation and elaboration entails the reconsideration of the figure of the savage in the state of nature and the citizen-subject in the State itself. Through the figure of the barbarian, the basic concepts of social and political theory – the State and the Law, power, violence, the social and the political, space, time, and freedom among them – are interrogated. While the dissertation is primarily concerned with the barbarian in early- to mid-eighteenth century French political theory, the dissertation is framed by an overview of the savage and the state of nature and ends with a discussion of 'the new barbarian' in recent political theory.

Savages, Barbarians and Citizen-Subjects

The barbarian represents a certain set of relations that can be drawn out in an admittedly formalistic manner: the barbarian is always in relation (although that relation certainly changes emphasis and content in each iteration) to the savage and to the citizen-subject.[9] Briefly, we could provide the following basic schematic: the savage is without Law and State, the barbarian has Law but no State, and the citizen-subject has both Law and State.[10] Through an emphasis on one figure in relation to the other two, a particular author is able to bring different elements and positions into relief. For instance, state of nature arguments, such as those put forward by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, move immediately from the savage to the citizen-subject, skipping the barbarian. One should not, however, immediately read Rousseau in relation to Hobbes and Locke. One should also consider an intermediary position put forward by someone like

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[9] I use the word 'savage' throughout despite the common belief that Rousseau wrote about 'noble savages;' he did not and could not have done so. (Similarly, there is nothing particularly 'noble' about Hobbes' "vainglorious" savages either.) Rousseau never describes the savage as noble (Ellingson 2001, especially Chapter 6; Sinclair 1991). The addition of 'noble' is a product of subsequent reception and interpretation. Rousseau could not have coherently spoken of a *noble* savage because nobility implies a social – if not also a political – relation and the state of nature is purposefully constructed to *remove* social and political relations from consideration. In the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Rousseau is quite clear: "The philosophers who have examined the foundations of society have all felt the necessity of returning to the state of nature, but none of them has reached it. […] They spoke about savage man, and it was civil man they depicted" (38). Claiming to have extended beyond the projection of culture into nature, Rousseau suggests the savage "satisfies his hunger under an oak tree, quenching his thirst at the first stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that supplied his meal; and thus *all* his needs are satisfied" (40 – emphasis added). It should be noted that Rousseau does not include companionship or the presence of other humans as one of "his needs" – all of the needs are satisfied by food, water, and a comfortable place to make a bed; all of which can be satisfied independently of others. It should be noted that sustenance is attained *via* the fruits of trees; hence, savages do not even band together to hunt game. Indeed, reproduction of the species is not even considered a necessity; it is something that happens "fortuitously" on the basis of "chance encounters" with the relationship ending as quickly and fortuitously as it began (48). This claim is reiterated in *On the Social Contract* in the second chapter where "the most ancient of all *societies* and the only natural one, is that of the family" (142 – emphasis added). The perpetuation of the family beyond necessity (i.e., the time at which the child no longer needs "the father" – no mention of the mother, a significant change from the description in the *Discourse*) "no longer takes place naturally but voluntarily," that is, "the family maintains itself only be means of convention" (*ibid*). The family, then, as the "most ancient society" is a boundary object (or, more accurately, a boundary relation) between nature and culture.

The term "citizen-subject" is hyphenated in order to bracket the form of society and government associated with the "man of the state" – in a sense, all "citizens" are "subjects," but not all "subjects" are "citizens." The important element is that the citizen-subject is taken to be of the State and not of Nature. The precise meaning of 'the State' is dependent upon the particular conjuncture in which it is mobilized.

[10] These (Law and State) are not the only relevant vectors, similar sets of oppositions can be constructed relative to creation/destruction, origins/endings, solidarity, power, space, time, borders/boundaries, etc. Can a barbarian have a politics? Can a savage have a politics?

Montesquieu who, like the others, begins with a state a nature, but does not move from Nature to the State *via* the mechanism of contract and, thus, does not move directly from savage to citizen-subject. Rather, Montesquieu interjects a phase of barbarity between Nature and the State.[11] Hence, the full thrust of Rousseau's argument can only be appreciated if one takes account of its double-thrust: he criticizes Hobbes and Locke for projecting social relations into Nature and, thus, for beginning on a false start, and he criticizes Montesquieu for introducing the barbarian

[11] Book I of *The Spirit of the Laws* is concerned with three topics, each of which is assigned its own chapter: laws in general, the laws of nature, and positive laws. Bracketing the first chapter, we are left with the origin of purely human laws. The second chapter takes "man before the establishment of societies" as its point of departure. Montesquieu's argument is overtly aimed at Hobbes, who is cited by name. Contrary to Hobbes, Montesquieu suggests that in his natural condition, "man would at first feel only his weakness," hence, "peace would be the first natural law." However, natural curiosity based upon an interest in "the pleasure one animal feels at the approach of an animal of its own kind" and "the charm that the two sexes inspire in each other" (roughly: a primitive fraternity and a primitive family) would result in a what could be termed a 'pre-social sociality,' which Montesquieu cites as a law of nature. The next step of the argument sees the introduction of the barbarian, which is found in the third chapter on positive laws. According to Montesquieu, the 'state of war' is located between Nature and State. This war begins once men enter into society and, feeling the empowering effects of the collective, lose the feeling of weakness they had in Nature and gain a feeling of strength. (One might wonder if this frenzy of violence and discovery of power is comparable to Durkheim's (1995[1912]: 216-231) 'collective effervescence'? Like Montesquieu, Durkheim (1995[1912]: 225) attributes a 'feeling of strength' with the creation of society, "The first religious ideas have often been attributed to feelings of weakness and subjection or fear and misgiving, which supposedly gripped man when he came into contact with the world. […] I have just shown that the first religions have an altogether different origin [i.e., collective effervescence].)" The feeling of strength thus leads to war both within and between collectives. This dual war brings about Law. (There are textual reasons to believe that, for Montesquieu, the Law is not a neutral adjudicator – hence, Montesquieu is mistakenly called a liberal – rather, Law is the imposition of the will of the victorious party upon the defeated party. In effect, Montesquieu, like all the barbarists, takes Thrasymachus' side against Socrates.) Like war, which is both an internal and external relation, Law relates groups to one another and the members of the group to the group itself. Thus, externally, the 'right of nations' is formed (but, notably, on 'false principles'), while internally the 'political right' (i.e., between rulers and ruled) and the 'civil right' (i.e., between the various classes, castes, and categories within the group) is formed. 'Political right' and 'civil right' relate, respectively, to the 'political state' and the 'civil state.' The 'state' is the institutionalization of the relations of right. Hence, Montesquieu proposes the possibility of a group with right (=Law) but without a state (=institutionalization). That is, in our terms, barbarians with Law, but no State. The unduly neglected Part VI of *The Spirit of the Laws* tells the story of the 'origins' and 'revolutions' of the laws of the French and their monarchy from the time of the Merovingian (i.e., Frankish barbarian tribes) invasion of Roman Gaul (i.e., modern France) to the establishment of the Capetian dynasty (i.e., the then ruling dynasty in France). That is, Part VI confirms this interpretation insofar as it tells the story of the transformation of the Franks, with Law but no State, into the French, with both Law and State; the transformation of barbarians into citizen-subjects. (Additionally, one should note the inverse of the barbarian in Montesquieu's system: despotism is a State without Law and, hence, unnatural.)

Montesquieu is not normally viewed as a barbarist. As Singer points out, while Montesquieu cannot side with the Romanists, he equally "cannot really be considered a Germanist" (2005: 20n5, 22n25). The reason for Montesquieu's neither/nor position is that he defends both aristocratic freedoms, but also the elevation of the monarch over the aristocracy. However, for the reasons given previously, it seems more correct to call him a barbarist than anything else – he is certainly not a liberal nor a republican and aren't barbarians the pinnacle of violent hybridity?

between Nature and the State. It is the claim of this dissertation that, for instance, Rousseau's return to the state of nature/social contract argument is only understandable if one takes into account the earlier barbarist argument. This dissertation attempts to re-situate the history of political theory in relation to the barbarian. Such a move not only brings lost and forgotten elements (most notably the barbarian) to the surface, but it also forces a new reading and interpretation of canonical texts. Such a reading suggests that modern political theory is constituted through an oscillation between the position of the savage and the position of the barbarian. Hence, it quite possibly becomes the case that the 'default' position of Hobbes and Locke is itself a reaction to an earlier barbarist position.[12]

Precursors

With the exception of Stjepan Mestrovic's *The Barbarian Temperament* (1993), the figure of *the barbarian* has received little scrutiny. The idea of *barbarism* or *barbarity* has received much more attention. However, it is hard to sustain a relationship of equivalency between barbarians and barbarism: barbarism, in this sense, is understood as an explosion of the irrational, of the repressed, and of violence *within* civilization. It isn't barbarians who are barbaric, but citizen-subjects who should know better. Barbarism, thus, is a phenomenon "internal" to civilization asking questions such as, "How could Weimar Germany turn into Nazi Germany? How could otherwise cultured and educated people participate in the Holocaust?" (Bauman 2000[1989]; Elias 1994[1939], 1996[1989]). While I recognize the importance of asking the question how irrationality explodes in the midst of apparent rationality and how barbarism erupts in the midst

[12] Foucault (2003[1997]: 97-111) suggests Hobbes was attacking the barbarist argument put forward by the Levellers and Diggers who referred to the 'Norman yoke' in their tracts in which they defended the ancient freedom of the Saxons. Pocock (1987[1957], especially Chapter 7) presents the grounds for a case to read Hobbes in this way.

of apparent civility, this is this not the direction this dissertation intends to go.[13] Returning to Mestrovic, his interest is in barbarism restricted to a narrow corpus of theoretical texts and a narrow stretch of time: essentially Thorstein Veblen and Jean Baudrillard. Mestrovic's problematic is quite in line with the problematic of Bauman and Elias, although he turns his question away from Europe to the United States. While for the latter the question is "How does barbarism erupt in civilization?" for the former the question is "How does barbarism co-exist with civilization?" Hence, for Mestrovic, the question is, "why does modern (or American) society oscillate between consumption and violence?" The problem, however, is an excessive reductionism that equates civilization with consumption and barbarism with violence. As with Elias and Bauman, the importance of Mestrovic's question is recognized, but it is not addressed in this dissertation.

The most obvious precursor to a project such as this is found in texts that are not exclusively concerned with barbarians or barbarism, but, rather, that draw upon the work of the barbarists and their barbarians; *viz*., Hannah Arendt's (1966) *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and Michel Foucault's (2003[1997]) lectures at the Collège de France known as *'Society Must be Defended*.' While the present project certainly draws inspiration from both Arendt and Foucault, this project has a focus somewhat different from what is found in either of their work. Arendt questions the relationship between "race-thinking before racism" (i.e., the proliferation of 'barbarian races' (Franks, Gauls, Saxons, Normans, etc) in the barbarist discourse, on the one hand, and the establishment of the nation-state and imperialism, and, hence, racism, on the other. Like Arendt, Foucault is interested in the concept of race in the barbarist discourse, but this time in relation to what he calls 'race war' – a sort of warfare at the fringes of power that acts as a

[13] For an excellent critical overview of Elias' civilizing process in relation to genocide – certainly the de-civilizing case *par excellence* – see Powell (2004, especially Chapter 4).

means of organizing social and political power. The present dissertation is more closely allied with these problematics; however, their specific motivation (race, racism, and imperialism; war at the limits of power) is not mine.

Organization

In addition to brief prefatory and concluding remarks, the dissertation is organized into the following chapters:

- Chapter 1 – Reading and Writing the Barbarian
- Chapter 2 – The State of Nature and the Nature of the State
- Chapter 3 – Origins
- Chapter 4 – Freedom
- Chapter 5 – Decadence and Destruction
- Chapter 6 – Back to Nature
- Chapter 7 – The New Barbarians

Roughly, the first two chapters act as a 'theoretical introduction' to the problematic, the next three chapters turn to a consideration of the barbarist discourse, the sixth chapter considers Rousseau's inversion of the problematic, while the final chapter examines the resurgence of 'the new barbarian' in late nineteenth century and twentieth century political thought.

Outline

The first chapter, "Reading and Writing the Barbarian," is intended to introduce the problematic and discuss meta-theoretical and methodological problems. On the one hand, the meanings and implications of each of the savage, barbarian and the citizen-subject are discussed and, on the other hand, a theoretico-methodological orientation to the texts themselves, the context of their production, and the history of their reception are discussed. That is, the chapter addresses the problem of recognizing the barbarian. The primary problem to be resolved in this regard is to determine how one should read the presence (or absence) of the barbarian in modern political theory – and, indeed, how to detect that presence (or absence). This combines a 'how' and a

'why' question: how has the barbarian been used and why have authors opted to use the barbarian rather than other figures? I propose a 'textualist' rather than a 'contextualist' approach. That is, my concern is with the texts rather than the events surrounding the text that lead to their production. Hence, the concern is with 'theory' rather than 'history.' I suggest a three-fold interpretative strategy: (1) the internal structure of the text (a close reading); (2) the relation of that text to its contemporaries (a relational reading); and (3) the relation of the 'historical' text to present (or current) theoretical problems and problematics (a historico-interpretative reading). We could characterize each with the following questions: (1) "What is Montesquieu doing in *The Spirit of the Laws*?" (2) "What discourses is Montesquieu addressing?" and (3) "How does Montesquieu speak to our own problems?' The point of this three-fold reading is to remain sensitive to the changing meanings and uses of the barbarian in modern political theory. I characterize this theoretico-methodological approach as "deconstructive genealogy."[14]

The second chapter, "The State of Nature and the Nature of the State," situates the barbarists in relation to their precursors in the social contractarian tradition, especially Thomas Hobbes (1928[1650], 1998[1647], 2007[1651]) and John Locke (2003[1690]). The chapter recognizes that reducing the social contract tradition to two representatives from late seventeenth century England is misleading, however the point of the chapter is to introduce the structure of the state of nature/social contract to its two most well-known defenders – despite the significant differences in their respective iterations – who are also the two that most frequently appear in the barbarist discourse as opponents. The chapter seeks to present the anthropology of "the man in nature" as the savage and the institution of the social contract as the mechanism that transforms the savage directly into a citizen-subject. The chapter concludes exploring the possibility that the

[14] See Derrida (1974[1967], 1978[1966], 1982a[1968], 1982b[1971]); Foucault (1991a[1968], 1991b[1980], 1998a[1966], 1998c[1971]); Hoy (2004: 227-39); and Lecourt (1975[1969, 1972]).

hinge between Hobbes and Locke, on the one hand, and the barbarists, on the other, is to be found in Benedictus de Spinoza's political theory (2002a[1670], 2002b[1677]). The suggestion of this connection between Spinoza and the French barbarists extends beyond the recent 'New Spinoza' (Montag and Stolze 1998) fad: Henri de Boulainvilliers, the earliest writer that I associate with the barbarist discourse,[15] was among the first French Spinozists at the turn of the eighteenth century and cited Spinoza as an authority on religion, the Hebrew language, virtue, metaphysics, and politics.[16] Indeed, Henri de Boulainvilliers was the first to translate Spinoza's *Ethics* into French, which circulated widely, albeit clandestinely, among Deists and 'free-thinkers' in Paris. Further, the most famous barbarist, Montesquieu, who was familiar with Boulainvilliers' historical and philosophical writings, was accused of 'Spinozism' immediately after the publication of each of his *Persian Letters* and *The Spirit of the Laws* (Israel 2001: 11-2). Hence, it seems reasonable to believe that Spinoza's 'anti-Hobbesianism' (Negri 1991[1981]; Virno 2004) was significant in the development of the barbarist discourse.

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[15] This claim requires elaboration: Two obstacles stand in the way of asserting Boulainvilliers' priority. First, as indicated in the second and sixth footnotes above, the barbarian has been present throughout the history of political theory stretching as far back as the Greek dramatists and philosophers. Second, Boulainvilliers was not the first to construct an argument around the opposition between Frankish barbarians and the Roman Empire. With respect to the first obstacle, it is my contention that Boulainvilliers inaugurates a profound transformation in the theorization of the barbarian: whereas the barbarian was latent and passive in previous political theory, with Boulainvilliers the barbarian became an active and manifest point of action and enunciation – the barbarian begins to speak, act and make demands in his own name and interest. The answer to the obstacle follows from this. Francois Hotman's *Franco-Gallia* (1573) was likely the first text to seriously consider the laws of the Franks relative to the laws of the Romans. Hotman's account, however, attempts to strike a balance between universal law (i.e., the Roman *Corpus Juris*) and local custom (i.e., the laws and customs of the French). This project was in turn overdetermined by the conflict between the Protestant Huguenots and the fundamentalist Catholicism of the Guise family in which Hotman was the leading propagandist and polemicist on the side of the Huguenots (on the legal question, see Franklin 1961; on the political question, see Skinner 1978, especially Volume II, Chapter 8). Hence, while Hotman was the first to raise the question of the Frank, his intention was to defuse the conflict between radical Protestant and reactionary Catholic. Following the resolution of the French Civil War in the favor of the House of Guise and the Catholics, Hotman's barbarians receded from theoretical discourse. Hence, at best, Hotman's contribution to the barbarist discourse was abortive. In contrast, it was Boulainvilliers' intention to write history and conduct politics from the perspective of the barbarian. A necessary condition for the barbarist discourse is a 'positive barbarism' or a 'politics of the barbarian,' a condition met by Boulainvilliers, but not by Hotman. Also, see the references in notes 8 and 12 regarding the 'Norman York' and the English Civil War.

[16] See Arendt (1944: 44n5); Ellis (1988: 2, 4, 206); Israel (2001: 565-74); and Vernière (1954) on Boulainvilliers (306-22) and on Montesquieu (447-66) regarding Spinoza and the barbarists.

The third chapter, “Origins,” initiates the consideration of the barbarist discourse proper. This chapter interrogates the barbarian in relation to origins in four ways: (1) the origin of the barbarian in comparison with the savage; (2) the origin of law and power in war; (3) the origin of the barbaric race as means of structuring the community; and (4) the origin of the French monarchy in the blending of barbarian and Roman peoples. The barbarian emerges as a figure of violence and hybridity taking what he wants and destroying what he does not want. The title of the chapter is in the plural because the barbarist discourse rejects the possibility of a single origin; an origin is always multiple and always involves blending pre-existing entities.[17] The barbarian, unlike the savage, is not a blank slate and, hence, the community created by the barbarian does not begin in a default neutral position – behind the veil, as Rawls might put it. Barbarians, like the communities they create, have no origin. It is enough to say about barbarians that they ‘come from beyond.’ In the place of an actual origin, a series of origins – often fictitious and mythological – are constructed. Hence, the barbarist discourse operates in a mythic tone. I propose to interpret the many origins of the barbarian through the Durkheimian concepts of collective representation and collective effervescence; in essence, the barbarist discourse seeks to posit a political mythology in opposition to that of their enemies.[18]

The fourth chapter, “Freedom,” suggests that the barbaric opposition of Law and State is an argument in favor of freedom understood as Law-like, but against the impositions of the State. That the barbarist discourse emerged when it did is no surprise. The barbarists, looking at mythologized version of their ancestors, saw a certain freedom, associated with war and

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[17] As the references in the bibliography suggest, the present project asserts a certain filiation with what is called ‘post-structuralist’ thought. The questioning, interrogating and rejections – in short, the deconstruction – of the origin is an abiding concern of ‘post-structuralist’ thought. The classic ‘deconstruction’ of origins and identities is to be found in Derrida (1998[1996]). But, see also Deleuze’s discussion of “Lévi-Strauss’ paradox” (1990[1969]: 48-51) and Jean-Luc Nancy’s (2003[1993]) discussion of Sarajevo.

[18] See Allen (2000); Durkheim (1966[1895], 1974[1898], 1984[1893], 1995[1912]); Masuzawa (1988); and Pearce (2001[1989]).

feudalism that had all but disappeared. The disappearance of this freedom leads them to the conclusion that they were becoming an increasingly marginalized segment of political society (that nearly all of them held important positions in the state or were influential upon those who did never entered their mind). Thus, while it is unsustainable to claim that they were, in fact, increasingly marginalized, it is enough to say that they saw themselves as marginalized in comparison to their mythological image of the Frank.[19] A confluence of actual events led to this perception: the dispersion of war to the borders of the State when it was previously present both inside and outside the State during the feudal period; the centralization of the State itself with the concatenate decline in the legal and political power of the feudal lords and the Parlements; and, third, the rise of the monarch to absolutist power sitting above and beyond the State itself. It is no surprise, then, that the freedom of the barbarian is a direct challenge to all of these events: the barbaric warrior, the dispersion of power among the *leudes* and the attempt to return to the king to the position of first among peers.[20] The barbarian, then, posited a particular version of freedom in opposition to the construction of the modern, centralized, administrative State.

The fifth chapter, “Decadence and Destruction,” follows from the previous chapter in the sense that the barbarian presents the solution to a decadent and corrupt State; *viz.*, destruction. This chapter examines the relationship the barbarian has to creation and destruction, especially with respect to culture, the State and the Law. One of the problems to be explored here is the relation between the savage who, *via* ‘contract,’ *creates* society while the barbarian, *via* ‘war,’

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[19] The question of actual versus apparent marginalization is a historical question. Hence, it is not part of this project. On the changing nature and structure of the French aristocracy in the Old Regime, see Ford (1962) and Chaussinand-Nogaret (1985[1976]).

[20] The barbarists predated Heidegger in their fondness for etymological arguments. A major strategy on their part was to trace the history of a word, in this case *leudes* (~lords), as far back as possible and then use that uncovered meaning as a weapon in their political struggles.

destroys society. The problem, then, is, so to speak, a dialectic between the creative savage, the destructive barbarian and their relation to the State.

The sixth chapter, "Back to Nature," explores the end of the classical era of barbarism through the intervention of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1987a[1750], 1987b[1755], 1987c[1762]) interpreted as a return to nature to find the savage beneath the barbarian; a return that is culminated in Sieyès injunction that those aristocrats pretending to be barbarians should return to the forests of 'Franco-Gallia' – should they be able to find them. The second iteration of the state of nature/social contract is as much in opposition to its first iteration (i.e., Hobbes and Locke) as it is in opposition to the barbarist discourse. It is argued that Rousseau had to clear away the older concept of the savage found in Hobbes and Locke and the concept of the barbarian found in Montesquieu and his co-barbarists in order to make room for a new conception of the citizen-subject; a conception of the citizen-subject that was proper to republican and democratic government, but not quite as proper to the older absolutist monarchies.

The final chapter, "The New Barbarians," explores the resurgence of the barbarian in recent political theory, looking at appropriations of the barbarian, this time as an opponent of liberalism and capitalism on the verge of becoming global, in the late nineteenth century (i.e., Friedrich Nietzsche), the mid-twentieth century (i.e., Walter Benjamin), and the late twentieth century (i.e., Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri). As with the earlier barbarists, the modern barbarists posit a figure of the 'new barbarian' that is to act in the name of freedom and liberating thus destroying the present state of things.

Bibliography

A note on the bibliography: the bibliography is divided into three sections. The first lists the primary sources on the original barbarists. The second lists the primary sources on the new barbarists. The third lists secondary sources and general works relevant to the previous two sections, consequently cited and consulted sources are included.

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